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The Black Cat

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THE COURTING BLANKET

A charming story, by Maud Mosher, based on an ancient custom of the Sioux Indians.

AND SIX OTHER ABSORBING STORIES

Ten Cents

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The Black Cat

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The Courting Blanket.*

BY MAUD MOSHER.

FIVE years I have longed for the wild lands of the Dakotas. Five long years I have looked at the white ceilings when my eyes famished for the stars. I have washed dishes, scrubbed the floors, learned to keep the house, studied the books when my spirit craved the feel of the wind on my face, my nostrils the scent of the wild roses down by the river, my ears the song of the wild birds in the forests of my people. Five years the stone walls of this white man's school have caged me in when my heart cried out for one glimpse of the white teepees of the Sioux nation."

"But Mary, you love me—"

"I have listened to you, to your love wooing, you a Dakota, like myself. You woo as does the white man, not as the Indian. You sit by my side and whisper your love words in my ear. Whisper—as does the white man. I will live as does the Indian, free as the clouds that float in the summer sky—not as do these white women who work, work always in the house. I will live in a white teepee I will marry, yes, a man that I love. He will woo me openly, not with the whispered words of the white man. I will be wooed, I will wed, I will live according to the customs of my own people."

"Mary! My Prairie Flower, Mary! I love you and you love

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me. You cannot go back to the old Indian ways. You have lived in the schools, you have learned a better way. You cannot go back and live as do the old Indians of the reservation."

"I am a Dakota —"

"Mary, I too, have lived on the reservation. I know the customs of our fathers and I also know that the educated Indian girl cannot live like the barbarous Indians—"

The look of indecision, which for a moment flitted over the girl's face, turned to one of haughty pride as she answered: "I am an Indian. Their ways are my ways, their customs are my customs. Where they live there will I live, where they die there will I die and where they are buried there will I be buried, according to the rites of the Dakotas, the wildest, the strongest, the bravest of the Indian tribes."

"Mary, I love you. There is no one else but you in my heart. There never has been anyone else since my mother died. There never will be anyone else—"

"Your mother," the girl's voice softened, "tell me about her. Your father was a white man, your mother an Indian—a Dakota. That I know but tell me this, was your mother happy away from her people, living in the crowded cities of the white race?"

"My mother loved my father, his people were her people—"

"But was she happy?"

"She never said. She was silent—silent always."

"Did her voice laugh? Did her heart sing? Did her eyes smile when she beheld the stone walls, the crowded city streets? Tell me all about her."

"There is little to tell. My father was Irish. He went to the reservation in search of gold. There he met, loved, and married my mother in the little mission church. They went to the eastern city where I was born. He died and she went back to her own people, taking me, a little lad of six, with her. Soon after that she died also and, in a year or so, I was sent to school.

"You know the rest. In this school I was educated, going home twice, to the reservation, for a visit. Last year it was mine to go out into the world and show that the Indian can earn his bread the same as does the white man. I have proved that I am *a man*, even though a 'half-breed.' It is mine to make a home for my wife, to cherish and care for her. Won't you come with me, Mary, my Prairie Flower?" The eyes of Irish blue, under the straight black locks of the Indian, shone with the determined fire of his father's countrymen.

"You have not said—was your mother, the wild Indian girl, happy in her civilized home?"

"I do not know. I was just a child. She never spoke except just to answer 'yes' or 'no.' When she returned to the reservation they called her Weeping Cloud. Her name was Smiling Cloud when she went away. But Mary, we will not go to the cities. We will live in the little country towns with the blue sky above, the green grass and the flowers at our feet."

"I am an Indian. I care not for your whispers, the words of the white man."

"You love me? Tell me, Mary, you love me."

"I answer not except according to the customs of my own people, the Dakotas."

Without a backward glance the girl crossed the parlor and went slowly up the stairs to her room in the girls' dormitory. As the turn of the landing hid her from the eyes of her lover she sank down on the steps, for a moment, while she wiped the struggling tears from her eyes. "I am like a white woman who weeps at the pain in her heart. I will go back to my own people and, if my sweetheart loves me, he will follow me there and woo me according to the customs of the ancient red men."

Slowly her trembling limbs dragged themselves down the long hallway. She was glad that her room-mate was absent, so that she might sit for a moment, in the moonlight, with no one to know of the ache in her heart.

Her lover's form crossed the road and disappeared. Stretching out her arms, she cried: "James, you say there never was any girl but me. There never was anyone else in my heart but you, just you. There never, never can be. But these houses of stone, the locked doors, the moon and the sky outside, the freedom of the prairies—oh, James, can't you understand? I couldn't live, for always, this way."

She left the window and restlessly paced the floor. "I couldn't, I couldn't! I hate the white man. I hate the endless drudgery of the white woman. I will go back to my own people. I, a Dakota, the daughter of a chief. I will live in my own teepee with its door toward the rising sun. James, if you love me you will come too. If you do not—I will forget."

When Mary Prairie Flower, five years before, had been left an orphan she had been placed by the agent in charge of the reservation, in this Indian Training School. Rebellious and defiant, her first year at school had been one long struggle. After the first summer

vacation, with its freedom from the irksome books, she had become more contented until, within just a few months of the time when her five year school term was to end, the old wild spirit had taken possession of her heart.

James O'Reilly, the half Indian, half Irish boy, had graduated the year before from the same school. He had gone to a small nearby city and had now come back to the school to claim and marry, as they had planned, the girl he had loved since first he had looked into her shy, black eyes.

Every week she had written him and he had never dreamed of the wild, ungovernable tumult that raged in her heart, that found expression in words that seemed to herself to have been hidden way back in her soul, waiting, waiting—

* * * * * * * *

Exhausted with her three days' journey on the train, Mary fell asleep almost immediately in the poor little room at the frontier hotel from which, next morning, she would take the stage to the Indian Agency, the home toward which her longing thoughts had turned for the five weary school years.

The prairie wind was chilling as it struck the shivering girl perched on the high seat beside the driver. As the day wore on, the sun's rays became scorching. She had forgotten how hot the sun is in the treeless prairie lands. She had forgotten that the winds were so violent and so cold.

It seemed that she must have forgotten also the dust and sand in the air. She had forgotten that the buffalo grass turned gray so early in the summer. She had not forgotten the wild flowers, so glorious in their coloring, nor the yucca blossoms in the brakes, but today they brought only a startling pang of remembrance of the pansies blooming under the great oak tree in the girls' playground at school.

She roused herself with a start, throwing back her head fiercely, as she thought: "I am an Indian. I am returning to my own people. I will think of the white man's schools and his ways no more I will forget everything; their miserable customs, their English language, their—" Shocked and surprised, she found she was thinking in the hated tongue. She tried to think in the language of her childhood but it was unfamiliar. She had forgotten—perhaps there were no Indian words to express the civilized thoughts! Perhaps she had forgotten how to think Dakota thoughts!

She was roused by the driver thrusting his reins in her hand, jumping from the stage and lashing with his whip a coiled

horror that was even yet shaking in a warning rattle.

There were no other passengers. Silently they measured off the seemingly endless miles, unbroken by a single sign of habitation. The wind sank as the sun reached the meridian. High over the prairie the quivering air brought magical illusions of trees and lakes, surrounded by fairy castles of white.

Down through the shadowed gulch the road led where the last fierce battle between the Sioux and their enemies, the Pawnees, had been fought. Then up, up, the straining horses pulled the heavy stage, round a sharp turn, and the Agency, nestling in the tiny valley high up in the hills, with the camp of the Indians round it and the teepee she had yearned for came into view—the teepee where lived her old grandmother.

* * * * * * * *

July passed and August with its scorching winds, its cloudless skies parched by day and chilled by night. The old grandmother swayed back and forth, with hands folded in the dull despair of the aged.

Rising feebly, resting on her gnarled, oaken stick, with slow steps she reached the granddaughter who was the last of her descendants. "My child," came the Dakota words in the voice of the very old, "I know not the ways of the school, I cannot read the magical marks on the paper, I know not the manners of the white people but I do know that my granddaughter's heart is crying out for something I cannot give her

"I have watched the young school girls as they return home. It is always the same. They pine and droop in the teepees of the Dakotas Sometimes they return to the whites we have fought until we can fight no longer. Sometimes they forget but more often we wrap their blankets round them and let them sleep the long, long sleep. You are all that is left me but unless you can forget, I bid you return."

The grandmother with halting steps entered the teepee. Motionless the girl still stood, gazing with unseeing eyes into the east. If she could only weep as do the white women perhaps her heart would not ache so unceasingly. "Oh James, I want you to come. There is no way I can go to you. Grandmother does not understand. There is no way for me—to go—no way—" Sinking to the ground, with her face pressed to the brown buffalo grass, she lay until darkness covered the camp, when she crept into the teepee.

Over and over her passionate words repeated themselves to her unsleeping brain: "I am an Indian. I will be wooed, I will wed,

I will live according to the customs of my own people."

Her whole soul loathed the unclean ways of the camp, the dirty beds on the ground, the greasy kettles swinging over the camp fires, the teepees filled with smoke, the days with nothing to do, the never ending nights.

Her heart seemed almost breaking, when, clear and sweet in the moonlight, rose the soft notes of the Indian flute. She listened—the courting song of the Dakotas! Nearer and nearer, louder and clearer:

"My wild rose, my loved one,
Come thou out to me."

If the player were only the man she loved, but he was far away, in the white man's east.

Nearer came the tones of the flute! What Dakota maiden did not know the words of the ancient courting song!

"As the bird loves the sun,
As the breeze loves the tree,
So love I my wild rose,
Oh, come thou to me."

Mary buried her face in the blanket again. Just so she had dreamed of being wooed but in the dream there was only one player and he—Tears, like those of the white woman, filled her eyes.

The flute paused. The player listened and watched.

Again the notes rose on the moonlit night:

"My wild rose, my loved one,
Show thy face at the door
That opes to'ard the morn's sun—"

In the days when the red men roamed the forests, so wooed they the maidens of the camp.

She half rose from her couch, listening. The player was near, close in front of the teepee. She was the maiden he was wooing.

"Come, linger no more;
I love thee, my wild rose,
I long for thee sore."

Again the pause in the music, the long pause, the time when, if she cared for the player, the maiden showed her face at the teepee door. There was only one, she cared for no other player in the whole world.

Again the notes of the flute, the final invitation. If it were only James!

"My wild rose, my loved one,
Leave thy teepee for me,
As the moon's to the sun,
As the brook's to the sea—"

Just one peep but the flute was thrown aside as the voice she loved called, "Mary, my Prairie Flower!"

Running to the player, she found herself folded in a pair of strong arms, quite according to the white man's way, and the beautifully embroidered courting blanket was tenderly placed around her, while the voice she loved said: "My sweetheart, I have wooed you according to the customs of the Dakotas, I will wed you as you will, and—oh, I've the dearest little home waiting, ready for you, with trees and grass and flowers all around. Will you leave your teepee for me?"

The rippling laugh rose in her throat as she replied: "I will answer according to the ancient custom." Then, taking the fold of the courting blanket, she placed it over her head, while, with a contented sigh, she raised her lips to his—quite in the white woman's fashion.

"Together we'll make a home, a civilized home, and there we will be happy."

The Haunted Column.*

BY MARY MORRISON RAYNAL.

AMES RAVENEL had come into his inheritance. When Lohengrin resounded through old St. Michael's it rang as a jubilee, for the inheritance had made possible a heretofore hopeless little romance. Even in Charleston, where one may marry on love with no visible means of support, James Ravanel had been counted too poor for marriage—a young lawyer with nothing but his shingle by way of asset. But just as Helen Pinkey had begun to look a trifle wistful and to wonder when the world would recognize her legal light, James's Uncle Alfred, down on the old rice plantation, closed his inscrutable eyes. Sphinx-like in life, he died without revealing any of the secrets with which he seemed charged.

Surely crêpe hat band was never worn by more joyous soul than James Ravanel. Without waiting for the conventional period of mourning to elapse, the wedding was arranged. Helen, in a pretty flurry, gathered together her trousseau and her housekeeping supplies, equally excited over her bridal gown and her first kitchen towels.

They were in possession, before they realized it, of Ravanel Hall, that gray old mansion under the live oaks, with the ghostly gray moss waving, waving always about it. The rice fields crept almost up to its doors, beyond which cypress trees reared themselves from the black waters of the swamps.

Far from being depressed the James Ravanels were, at first, ecstatic. They explored every nook like the excited children that they were. Amid much that was charming in the old house there was little of value save for sentimental reasons. They found a few pieces of good old furniture along with much trash. There were several fine old portraits, but a dearth of life's comforts.

"The poor, poor old man, I don't believe he had a towel to his name!" Helen glanced with affection at her own well filled linen chest. "If he hadn't been your uncle, my sweetness heart, I should have thought him a miser."

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"Uncle, or no uncle, that's just what he was." James's tone was bitter. "He saw my mother, his only sister, die in poverty. He saw me, his heir and orphan nephew, work my way through college and never lifted a finger to help. If these worn-out acres hadn't been entailed he would have made way with them to keep me from getting 'em."

Rich though Uncle Alfred had been reputed, his nephew had been unable to find trace of stocks or bonds. No bank in Charleston counted him among its patrons. The plantation was in a pitiful state of neglect, lapsing almost into a jungle. A remnant of old negroes, scratching the soil lazily in spots, had raised barely enough for their own sustenance and that of their old master. But where was Uncle Alfred's fabled wealth, his inheritance from a rich father?

"It must be hidden about the place, Jimmie," Helen would reiterate.

"Nonsense! Why darling, that's a hackneyed tale, relegated to third rate fiction."

"But where is it?" she would persist. "He never spent a cent. Why, look at this precious old place, almost tumbling down for lack of repairs. There must be papers or money somewhere!"

As James worked, with the joyous zeal of the new husband, setting the place to rights and planning his campaign in the overgrown rice fields, he found himself secretly peering into dark corners and ripping off loose planks, haunted by Helen's suggestion of hidden wealth. Helen, having advanced the theory, was openly systematic in her search. She ransacked old wardrobes and pulled out heavy bureau drawers until she was exhausted.

"Is it the swamps that are taking the color out of your cheeks, little girl?" was James's anxious question.

"Disparaging his wife's looks already!" Helen would mock.

When he came in from his work she used to have, in the beginning, quaint little collections to show him—old daguerreotypes, yellow letters, moth-eaten bits of ancestral finery, but the scant treasures of Ravanel Hall were soon exhausted. It was only by a rare, uneasy reference, that James knew that his young wife was still possessed by her visions:

"It isn't that I value money unduly, Jimmie. But it's so tantalizing to know that it may be just at hand and we too stupid to find it!"

When there were no more crannies to be searched, nor housecleaning to be done, the days dragged wearily for Helen. James was always out on the plantation now, alert, delighting in his new

work, to which he had brought the spirit of the born planter; but it took all of the bravery of Helen's heart to keep her from falling into abject homesickness. The ache for human companionship became so great that under pretense of giving housewifely directions, she would spend the whole of the sultry morning in the kitchen with old black Judy. Judy's tales were diverting, and the childlike interest of the new mistress of Ravanel Hall fired the old woman to lurid tales of its *ante bellum* splendor.

One evening after tea, as James turned as usual toward the front portico, Helen stayed him:

"Let's sit in the drawing-room to-night, Jimmie."

"Why, my dear, it's a perfect bake-oven in there. Aren't you feeling well?"

She hesitated. "Come outside," he insisted, "there's a glorious moon, and a little breeze is coming up."

She followed as far as the wide doorway, shivered, turned back: "The swamps are getting on my nerves, Jimmie."

Thoroughly alarmed, Jimmie began to talk of tonics or a visit home, both of which the girl declined: "Show the white feather this early in the game—Jimmie, you don't know your wife!"

With the sunlight of the next morning, Helen's courage revived: "Jimmie, it was too ridiculous, but do you know, I was afraid, actually afraid to go out on the porch last night! Judy had been telling me such creepy tales about the end column."

"What, for instance?"

"She said that it was haunted, and told queer tales of the rappings and groanings that it would give forth. She said every negro on the place believed that it was haunted, that your Uncle Alfred himself used to say so."

"Uncle Alfred used to say so? The old woman's in her dotage."

"Still, you know, living here all by himself the poor man may have gotten a little touched," she tapped her forehead significantly.

"'Touched'? I saw him the week before he died and he was no more 'touched' than I am. If Uncle Alfred told the darkies that the column was haunted he had a reason for doing so."

A sudden light flashed from one pair of eyes to the other, but they did not speak out their thoughts.

After Helen went indoors, James looked long and earnestly at the end column, tapped it, prodded it around its base, but it was in no wise different from the three other columns.

The Greek portico, with its gray sandstone columns of exceptional size, was the distinctive feature of the old house. The end column,

catching the first rays of the moon, gleamed white when all of the rest of the building was shrouded in gloom. Viewed from a distance, it alone stood out, slender, ghostly, sufficient in itself to inflame the African imagination. That Uncle Alfred, playing upon racial superstition, had set the ghosts to guard his treasure, James was now assured.

But how to get at it? Throughout the day he wrestled with the problem, and that night after Helen had gone to bed and the echo of her light footsteps had died in the halls, he still sat gazing at the baffling column. Nothing short of dynamite, apparently, would make any impresion upon it. Finally, from long gazing at the portico roof, came the thought that there might be an opening up there.

Snatching a lantern, James ran swiftly up the great spiral stair to the second story, then on up the smaller stair to the attic. Creeping from beam to beam of the unfinished attic, knowing that a false step would send him crashing through the plastered ceiling of the room below, James at last reached the low slanting roof of the portico. The heavy beams of the roof rested squarely across the tops of the columns. Crawling out to the end column, he not only found it true that the column was hollow, but there was sufficient space between the beam and the circular wall of the column for a man to slip through. Swinging his lantern into the opening, he saw that the inner edges of the stones of which the column was built were irregular, jutting out for a sufficient distance to afford a foothold.

With the recklessness of youth James slid over the edge of the wall. His heart was thumping to suffocation. Slipping in his perilous descent, a wave of horror swept over him at the thought of death in this trap, his poor little wife forever ignorant of his end. Climbing down, and down, what seemed to him twice the height of the column, one foot at last struck solid ground, the other foot came down sharply on something that gave out a metalic ring. Stooping with difficulty in the narrow space, James seized upon a large tin box.

After convincing himself by groping over every inch of ground, that this was the sole content of the column, he began to climb the interminable height. Ladened with his heavy burden the ascent would have been impossible for anyone a whit less athletic and surefooted than James Ravanel; but so triumphant was he now, so thrilled with joyous excitement, that personal danger was well nigh lost sight of. Panting, disheveled, covered with dust and cobwebs, he broke into his wife's room.

"What is it?" Helen opened startled eyes.

"Pandora's box!"

James tumbled the rusty tin box down on the little white bed beside her, wrenching off the lid as he spoke. Age-stained documents, with crackling red seals, filled one end of the box, the bulk of which was packed with bank notes. Thrusting a trembling hand into their depths, Helen drew it out filled with hundred dollar bills. Their size and color told their own pitiful tale.

"Confederate money!" she wailed.

Refusing to believe the worst, James drew out the documents and with sinking heart ran through them—bonds of the "Lost Cause."

Representing nothing on God's earth now,
And naught in the waters below it;

Helen quoted with a catch in her voice.

For an instant their eyes faltered away, each unable to look upon the piteous disappointment in the other young face. Then the courage of their race asserted itself.

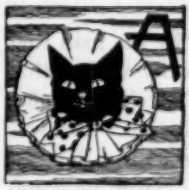
"It's in the rice fields that our fortune lies hidden, Jimmie," his wife encouraged him. "With your energy and ability you will soon restore Ravanel Hall to all its lost prestige."

But James's thoughts were with his dead uncle. "It's worth all that the search has cost us to understand, at last, that poor old man. Not content with shedding his blood for the South, he had evidently sold his good United States securities in order to support the Confederate government. When all was over he lowered this box into what he supposed was its last resting place, and with his strange reserve he kept his secret until the end. While we were cursing him for a miser he was as much a pauper as any of us. Uncle Alfred, I beg your pardon!"

As the last words rang solemnly through the still house it seemed to the two young hearts that a brooding peace settled over it.

Phelia's Fetish.*

BY LAURA B. SCHREIBER.



"AH was bohn in '45. Yessum, a slave. Ophelia Simpson is mah name but Ah allus was called Phelia for sho't. Ah married Aleck when Ah was sixteen, when the wah oveh the niggehs broke out."

"Born in '45, this is 1910, so you are, let me see," I figured aloud, "1845 from 1910, sixty-five."

"Is that hit? Ah neveh done the sum, Ah jes remembeh the yeah Ah come in."

"Do you think you are able to do the work of a large family?"

"Ah allus have wucked an' Ah allus 'spect to; if you all don't lak mah way—why all you have to do is to blow yoh ho'n an' ole Phelia'll mahch. Ah want sump'n to do an' Ah want some money. Ah has to fergit mahself; Ah's had so much trouble pears lak Ah feel numb an' quare."

"Come in and have breakfast and perhaps if you tell some one your trouble you will feel better."

Phelia ate as if half famished. She drank her coffee with deep satisfaction and when she shoved back her chair and wiped her lips with the back of her hand, she heaved a mighty sigh.

"Ah can't tell you all mah troubles,—'twould take too long but Ah can give you a outline of some of 'em. Ah come out wes' heah to live with mah daughteh, she died an' lef a mite of a gal that Ah tried mah bes' to nuss along to life but 'twant no use, she died an' the man didn' have no mo' use for me. So that's the way Ah come to pile in on you fo' breakfas'. Praise God Ah hain't got to be thinkin' of a empty bread basket for a while. When Ah seed yoh ad Ah nevah waited to get mah breakfas', Ah jus' put on mah hat an' come."

"You said you were married at sixteen," I reminded her.

"Yessum, married Alexander Simpson, a half breed black man but he was white an' Ah was black. Ah am not full blood—you can see," and with a deft movement she had the hair pins and

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combs out of her hair and it unrolled in bands of wavy satin and fell below her waist. Never had I seen such hair before. She smiled as she read the admiration in my face.

"Yessum, that hain't nothin' tho' to what it was when Aleck got me. It reached to mah knees then. Hit was beauteous to behol'. Ah allus thot he married me fer the hair; he wanted folks to know that he could catch the gal with the fines' haid o' hair in the county.

"A gal feels mighty proud when she's picked out by the man that all the other women want, but in the end she generally wishes that he'd a give her the go by. Ah neveh knowed no res' afteh he singled me out. Ah loved him but it didn' give me no pleasah. He was han'some; a roun', red, smilin' face; white, even teeth that he was always showin'. Black, curly hair; not wool, hair. How he could sing, dance an' play the pianah but he was the devil's right han' man. An' me, Ah was a lovin' him an' couldn' quit. Women ev'ry-wheh, an' Aleck had eyes fer 'em all.

"The ones that he'd tu'ned a col' shouldeh to when he was co'tin me, he now paid his respects to; an' me a eatin' mah hah't out, bringin' mah babies into the worl' so mean they wouldn' sleep an' wouldn' let nobody else. Ah packed knives up mah sleeve, a gun in mah stockin' leg but Ah neveh cut or shot nary one o' the women Ah said Ah would. At first Ah believed what he tol' me in spite of appearances, till some o' mah frien's let on they was talkin' oveh things they thot Ah knew. Ah neveh let on when they shot their pizen. Ah jes' smiled an' said: 'Oh yes, the pahty you all attended. Yes, Pappy enjoyed hisself.' But Ah reckon they knowed they was tellin' me news, fer they could read it in mah face. Ah could see they all felt bettah afteh they handed it to me."

"Perhaps they didn't always tell the truth. Did you investigate?" I inquired.

"Yessum, Ah did, much to mah discomfo't, Ah did. Ah stahted in to raise Cain as Ah told you. Ah was goin' to kill the woman that come in between me an' mah sweetheart but Ah foun' Ah'd have to cahve or shoot up quite a numbeh of the residents. So Ah put away mah munitions o' wah.

"Then Ah tried the woman's way,—teahs, oh Lo'd, the briny teahs Ah shed; enough to irrigate all the gahdens in town. It wucked fer a sh't time but Ah gave out at it. Then Ah grew resigned but Ah felt wuss then eveh, an' while Ah was at this faze, Ah went one day to draw some watah from the well; we drawed it up by han' with buckets. Ah tuck a holt o' the rope an' looked down into the cool

well. Ah could see the watah tremblin' away down at the bottom an' mah own face was lookin' up at me. Some way Ah fell to wishing' Ah was—well—daid; laid in a grave, senseless, with no feelin' where nothin' couldn' hurt no mo'.

"Ah spoke to the woman, the shadder woman in the well. Ah says: 'Phelia, Ah wish Ah was you, cause you haint got no feelin'.' An' all of a sudden Ah remembehed Daddy once said there was twenty feet o' watah in the well. Ah said to Phelia way down ther: 'Ah'm not six feet high.' An' then Ah couldn' say nothin' fer the thots that come crowdin' in. 'Wouldn't nobody care,' says Ah, 'Aleck with crape on his hat or on the lef' sleeve o' his light coat or the lady frien's whisperin': 'Crazy jealous an' Mr. Simpson is such a nice man.'

"Ah stepped up on to the curb an' tuck a holt o' the rope. Jes' then a bird, a mockin' bird, stahted in to whistle an' Ah stopped to listen. He whistled lak a boy an' Ah begun to look fer him, an' fin'ly Ah 'spied him on the tallest twig o' the tree above mah haid He perked his li'l haid an' we looked one another in the face. When he seed Ah was thinkin' o' him he drawed hisself up an' commenced to rush his song, a waterfall hit was. He swung back an' forth from one foot to the other while he slid his notes from the cry of the eagle to the whinny of a colt, an' then he lef' his perch an' stahted to climb the air afteh the song he'd breathed to heaven, but he changed his min' an' with a roll o' chuckles he slid down an' rested on a limb in front o' me.

"He cocked his haid to one side: 'peep, peep, peep,' he said, lak a li'l los' chicken; an' jes' then a whinin' li'l voice called out, 'Mammy, an' Ah come back to earth. 'Good Lo'd,' Ah says, 'mah baby is hungry.'

"Ah run to him, Ah tuck him in mah ahms an' helt him tight an' talked to him. Couldn't get his own dinnah, had to wait till his ole crazy mammy got done thinkin' of her troubles. Pore baby done come to earth without his permission, neveh to know a Pappy's love an' no recollection of his mammy 'ceptin' her foolish teahs. Ah talked to him as he was eatin' his dinnah an' he sighed as if to say: 'Hits all right.' Ah felt his lips slip away an' he was asleep.

"Madam, a change came oveh me then. Ah shivered now at the thought o' bein' at the bottom o' that well but how could Ah get peace o' mind? What could Ah do to free mahself from that far inside o' me that was consumin' me? Ah couldn' tend to mah chillun right. Pears lak Ah couldn' fix mah min' on nothin'. Ah was walkin' up an' down in the garden an' didn' see nothin' nor

hear nary a noise till Ah felt somebody touch me. Ah tu'ned an' they was a ole bent oveh black woman standin' right up agin me.

"'What do you want?' Ah asked her.

"'To give you a fetish, Madam,' she answered.

"'What is a fetish?'

"'A fetish, Ma'am, is a charm; sumpin' that'll give you yoh wish.'

"'Ah don' believe in yoh fetish,' Ah says, but in mah min' Ah grabbed at it.

"'You ort to have it,' says she, lookin' right knowin' at me. 'You are in trouble.'

"An' without thinkin' Ah up an' tole her ev'rythin'.

"Ah was sorry after Ah tole her an' was glad too. She looked me oveh with her ole snake eyes, fin'ly she says:

"'Get you a full grown black cat, get aholt of him an' tote him acrost a crick; you mus' wade hit. Make a far an' put a kittle o' watah oveh. When the watah biles, drap in yo' cat, slap a led on an' weight hit down with a awful heft, 'cause the cat natch'lly will resist. Bile him stiddy all day, when the meat is cooked so as it'll slip off'n the bone, search for that bone as won't reflect hitself in a lookin' glass. When you fin' it, hol' onto it. Hit'll bring you anything you want.'

"Ah couldn't sleep that night fer thinkin' o' the rite Ah had to perform in the mo'nin' an' when day broke Ah was up an' a stirrin'. Ah give Caesar Johnson two bits to catch me a cat. Ah had to sack him fer he was wild as a buck an' Ah had a long way to go to get to the crick. Ah had to go through heavy woods an' ever'thing was so purty that Ah plum fergot to sigh till Ah begun to git tired, fer the cat was gettin' heavy an' by the way he raved an' swo' Ah suspicioned he was agin fetishes.

"Bimeby Ah sat down to res' an' Ah heard s'ngin' peared lak at a distance. Ah got up an' went on an' fore half an hour Ah come onto a full fledged camp meetin' staked out in the woods, 'sunrise services' says Ah to mahself. They was white folks, the preacher an' all, an' when Ah come closer Ah heard him say 'The Lo'd loveth whom he chastenth.' 'Think,' sez Ah, 'how he mus' love men.' Ah drapped the cat behin' a log fer he was makin' an awful fuss, an' Ah slipped along to get closeh to the pahson till Ah fin'ly found a seat.

"Madam, that disco'se was certainly fer me. He tole about the Man o' Sorrows. He pictured His life without a single joy in it, an' how He kept a comin'; they couldn' down Him. He neveh registered a kick nor pitied Hisself. His min' was on sum'pn higheh;—lovin', fergettin' an' fergivin' was what He was a doin' an' He done hit

oveh an' oveh agin but He didn' do hit by Hisself. He was a pow'ful man but He, even He, had to lean on somebody higheh. The pahson said a heap mo' that was ba'm to this ole storm-tossed soul, afteh which they all knuckled down to pray. Lo'd how Ah prayed in mah own way an' then we all sung, 'Come ye sin-nehs.'

"While everybody was talkin' an' shakin' hands Ah slipped out, untied the sack an' shuck mah fetish out. What was mah surprise when, insted o' him makin' tracks to git away from me, he neveh run a step; he set down an' went to makin' his toilet, slickin' an' prunin' his feathehs, stoppin' every stroke or two to look up into mah face.

" 'That meetin' has changed yo' haht,' says he, 'ef you was the heathen you was a hour ago Ah wouldn't be settin' heah lickin' mah paws. Ah'd be makin' tracks to git away.'

" 'Ah knows it,' Ah says, an' stahted home, an' Tom come along.

"Ah tuck the sho'tes' way home an' Ah sung as Ah went. The bad feelin' wasn't all gone but Ah didn't feel so heavy an' Ah begun to see light. Ah'd foun' some one to talk to that wouldn't tell.

"When Ah got home there was a crowd in mah ya'd an' in the house. Ah wa' n't nary bit excited, but Ah knew sumpin bad had happened. Ah went into the house an' Aleck was stretched out on the baid with a doctah an' a nuss waitin' on him. Hit was the first time he'd been home in a month. Ah never knowed who handed him his medicine but Ah saw in a minute he was passin' out.

"When he seed me he opened his lips an' Ah bent to'd him.

" 'Phelia, try an' fergive me, Ah've been shot.'

" 'Shall Ah go an' get the chillum?' Ah asked.

" 'No, no, stay heah, they wouldn't understan' an' it's just as well they can't. Will you fergive me, Mammy?'

" 'Hits not me you ort to ask, Pappy. Ah reckon Ah has nothin' to fergive. Hits between you-all an' the Master.' Ah stooped an' kissed him an' he went out.

"Ah raised mah chillum, they all tuhned out tol'able fair an' nothin' has shuck me up so in yeahs as mah daughter an' the little gal a dyin'.

"Now missus, do you think you'd lak to give me a trial at house wuck or shall Ah go on?"

"No, you may stay, and we shall see how we get on. There's a washing in the laundry all ready to start on."

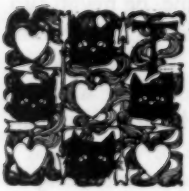
"All right, Madam, Ah'll roll up ma sleeves an' go at it."

Phelia went to her work singing in a quavering voice:

Jesus died fo' you, fo' me.
On the tree He died fo' me.

The Romance of a Squint.*

BY MIRIAM CRUIKSHANK.



HERE was once an artist who, earning his living by making sport of other people's woes, sprung upon the public a series of portraits labeled something on this wise: "This is Miss Smith, who is in love with Mr. Brown and is to be married to Mr. Jones. This is Mr. Jones, who is going to marry Miss Smith and who is in love with Miss White. This is Mr. Brown, with whom Miss Smith is in love, who is in love with Miss Green, but who is going to marry Miss White."

It was all very amusing — to the onlooker. But if your name was Doris Haskell and you were not a raving tearing beauty — just ordinarily pretty, and were twenty-one your last birthday, and had an Aunt Cordelia who had decreed that you were to marry a rich, fat ex-senator who was long past fifty and twice a widower, while you — well, maybe you wouldn't have such a keen sense of humor yourself.

Most persons spoke of Aunt Cordelia as a very remarkable woman, well stocked with ideas — only her immediate family had any notion as to how alarmingly well stocked. She was a very energetic woman, and when not engaged with larger issues, such as criticizing the length of the President's message, or curtailing the expenses of her favorite organized charity, she busied herself with collecting the scattered interests that made up the lives of those about her and fitting them into neat, well conducted puzzle pictures.

Since she had kept Doris's conscience and regulated the length of her skirts for twenty years, she saw no reason for relinquishing the job until her niece should become a finished product. Of course there was always the possibility of a disturbing element entering and upsetting her calculations, and to this end she felt it behooved her to be ever on the alert.

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The disturbing element arrived suddenly and without warning in the shape of a young man — a most ordinary young man from Aunt Cordelia's standpoint. His name was Claude William Mortimer, which in itself was a crime. What self-respecting woman would want a nephew-in-law named Claude William? Even the fact that his masculine friends had charitably rechristened him Bill went but a little way toward palliating the offence.

For the rest Claude William was an innocuous youth, of fair education and good taste in dress, who had inherited more money than was good for him from an enterprising maternal grandfather who had made it in the grocery business (Aunt Cordelia was a Colonial dame), and whose sole distinguishing characteristic was a slight cast in his left eye. A distinction, by the way, that had the effect of leaving his best friends in doubt as to which way he was heading.

Just why Doris should have chosen to fall in love with this very usual specimen of a by no means unusual species is a mystery no sensible middle-aged person can fathom. But fall she did and to such an extent as to lose her spirits, her appetite, and, through too much crying, to threaten destruction to her complexion — her chief asset.

To complicate matters, Claude William, who because of his name and his humble ancestry was scorned by Aunt Cordelia, was diligently sought after by two mothers of marriageable daughters, who were not so exacting in their demands. An income built upon a foundation of sugar was as good as any other in their eyes, providing, of course, it was of such size as to make it desirable in the family.

That neither of the daughters in question seconded her mother's efforts was a small matter. That neither was interested in Claude William, save as the friend of two other youths, was an even smaller matter. That they were friendly toward each other and kindly disposed toward Doris did not count at all in the eyes of the maternal maneuverers — which was perhaps just as well.

What Claude William thought no one chose to inquire. There is a theory that any woman can have any man she wants if she sets her mind to it. Just how that theory may be substantiated outside of Turkey or Utah, when three women want

the same man at the same time, has never been explained, but both Mrs. Leonard and Mrs. Marsh, the two mothers in question, believed in it firmly.

Doris had not arrived at the theorizing time of life, so she could only sob out her heart among the pillows, when she knew Aunt Cordelia was out of hearing distance, and confide to Rags, her bull terrier, that she knew Claude William loved her — loved her devotedly. Else why did he look at her as he did?

There is no telling how long matters would have remained in this unsettled stage if there had not been a meeting of the Ethical Culture Society under the auspices of the University Extension. Aunt Cordelia was going to the meeting and the ex-senator, who was to address it, had suggested that they go together in his car. Doris had pleaded a headache and Aunt Cordelia had accepted the excuse. She thought this as good a time as any other to talk over matters with the ex-senator and see if he agreed with her in those that were important.

At about half-past three Doris found her headache so much improved that it seemed as if nothing but fresh air was required to complete the cure. So she dressed herself in the most becoming walking costume she owned and started down the street. Midway of a crowded thoroughfare she came face to face with the Misses Leonard and Marsh, who stopped to exchange greetings.

"We are going over to The Sign of the Rose for afternoon tea," said Miss Leonard, "come along, Doris — it's lots of fun." Doris's eyes sparkled, but she hesitated.

"If there's nobody else, Marion —" she began. Miss Leonard giggled and Miss Marsh looked conscious.

"We are going to telephone to two of the boys," the former explained. "They always meet us there when we have an afternoon that we can count on, but you needn't mind. We'll tell them to bring somebody along for you — who shall it be? I say, Elsie," turning to Miss Marsh, "let's do our duty like little lambkins and ask old Claude? Think how we'll be commended at home if we say we have been teaing with Claude and don't mention the rest of the crowd. Doris doesn't mind — whyeee" interrupting herself, "you don't mean, Doris, that you — ?" For Doris had blushed, not just an ordinary little

blush, but a deep, throbbing, heart-reaching, tell-tale crimson.

And then because she had kept in until she couldn't keep in any longer and because she had found both the pillows and the bull terrier rather inadequate as confidants, she blurted out a story that dealt with Aunt Cordelia and a fat ex-senator and a belief in an undying love, even though unspoken, because of a certain expression in Claude William's eyes.

It was the final confidence that brought a twinkle to Miss Leonard's own optic, but she was too kind hearted to let Doris see. She only patted that young person's arm, said it was a beastly outrage, that the senator ought to be ashamed of himself, and a just punishment would be to make him marry Aunt Cordelia herself. Then all three girls hurried into The Sign of the Rose, which was one of the prettiest tearooms in town. Doris and Miss Marsh sat on a sofa in a secluded corner and discussed the injustice of the world, while Miss Leonard went into the telephone booth and did some talking that would have sorely upset the calculations of three middle-aged ladies, had they known.

Not so very many minutes later a little party of six was gathered in an inconspicuous corner of The Sign of the Rose. There were three tables in the corner, each just big enough for two and the Misses Leonard and Marsh, feeling that they had done their duty for the afternoon, turned their shoulders upon Doris and devoted themselves to their escorts. As it happened Doris did not mind. For the first time in her life she was knowing the bliss of an hour's uninterrupted and unchaperoned conversation with Claude William Mortimer.

And Claude? Well Claude, despite his name and his ancestry, upheld his end of the line wonderfully. If he had never given a serious thought to little Miss Doris before, he was astute enough not to say so. Maybe he felt that a good deal of the attention he had hitherto received from the fair sex was due to those sugar-made millions. In which case there must have been a certain joy in knowing that he was being loved for himself alone, by a very pretty girl, who was more than willing to throw over an ex-senator, with something of a career to his credit, for his sake.

Be that as it may, before the party broke up for the afternoon that undying love, of which Doris had dreamed, had been not only

looked, but spoken. She shyly assented when Claude suggested that they should confide their newly found happiness to the others, and caught herself listening with a delicious horror to a plan that they should elope. It was really the most sensible thing they could do, so the whole party agreed. When there was an Aunt Cordelia and an ex-senator to be reckoned with, there was no knowing what would happen. Yes, they must certainly elope — but when?

It was too late this afternoon to buy a license and a ring, and find a minister, and pack a bag, and do all the things that were necessary to a well conducted elopement, and to-morrow — Well, there was no telling when Aunt Cordelia would give another entire afternoon to Ethical Culture. It was the practical Miss Leonard who in the end solved the problem.

"You can't do *all* the things this afternoon, of course," she said, "but you can do most of them. Some one told me that you could get a license at any time up to six o'clock and it isn't much after five now. Claude can go up to the City Hall now and Jack," she nodded at her own swain "and I will go buy the wedding ring. Doris you run along home and pack a bag, and Elsie will go with you and sneak it out without even Miss Cordelia suspecting, and I guess that just leaves Joe to keep Claude company and hunt up a minister."

"And then — ?" demanded the other five in a chorus, as Miss Leonard paused for breath. "And then —" she said, airily, "Oh, the rest is easy. We are all going to the Fortnightly dancing class to-night and Claude is to lead the German. Now, Claude, you mustn't get your feelings hurt, for I am one of the best friends you ever had. And you, Miss Doris, needn't get snippy, for I'm only trying to circumvent Aunt Cordelia. Listen to me —" And, resting her elbows on the table, Miss Leonard unfolded her scheme.

When Claude William Mortimer stepped forward to choose a partner at the Fortnightly dancing class that night, no one would have dreamed from his manner that he was about to choose one for life also. He cast a somewhat erratic glance around him and let his eye linger upon a certain section of the ballroom.

Doris was there, demure as ever, and guarded by Aunt Cordelia. Marion was there, a little to Doris's right. Elsie was there also, perhaps an equal distance to her left, and both were watched

with maternal vigilance. To an unbiased observer it would seem that Claude William's persuasive glance wavered among the three.

"It's you of course," whispered Mrs. Leonard and Mrs. Marsh simultaneously to their daughters.

"It's you, I suppose," hissed Aunt Cordelia into her niece's ear. "Such impertinence! These dancing classes are absurd, anyhow. By another season —"

Three maidens arose in blushing unison and Claude William, conscious of a subdued titter in the background, turned a vivid crimson, but did not lose his nerve. Instead, he held aloft a mass of ribbon, gay of hue and much adorned with loops and bows, and with unerring hand, threw one end of it about — not one, but all three girls — Doris between the other two. Then as the titter rose to a faint cheer, he boldly drove them three abreast across the ballroom, through an archway into a tiny annex beyond.

The next man, whose name was Jack, hesitated, as though fearful of his ability with the ribbon. His hesitation was short, but it was long enough to hold every eye in the room and prevent any one from seeing that as he passed the archway Claude William released his two outside steeds from their gay harness and drove Doris on alone.

There were French windows in the annex that opened on to a veranda which led down to the street, and Claude William had no further fear. He wisely calculated that his absence would not be commented upon until time for the next figure of the German and by then — well, the ring and the license were in his pocket, his automobile was at the corner, and an obliging minister was waiting not three blocks off.

"It's a shame to take such easy money," he said, as he swung Doris off the veranda and, seizing her hand, ran with her up the street.

It is rumored that Aunt Cordelia will marry the ex-senator herself, in order to keep him in the family. She has graciously forgiven Doris for her rebellion, but she is still unreconciled to the name of Claude.

A Study in Discontent.*

BY FLORENCE MARTIN EASTLAND

FROM a drawer of her elegantly appointed desk Mrs. Provine took a newspaper clipping. While reading, she rested her graceful dark head upon her delicate hand; and the melancholy droop of her mouth grew more pronounced as her blue eyes followed the lines. It was a brief announcement by an Eastern daily that articles on the subject, "Studies in Discontent," would be published and paid for, and that the real names of the writers would not be divulged.

Mrs. Provine breathed a relieved sigh as she lifted a pen and adjusted a sheet of paper. At the removal of the barrier, pride, the accumulated misery of weeks was ready to overflow. Had it not been for that obstacle, she would long ago have unburdened her mind to a friend who understood her, sympathized with her. She wished to be sure, painstakingly sure, that her unhappiness was well-founded before — but that step was scarcely premeditated yet. She must first decide just why her married life was a miserable failure.

She boldly wrote the title, even to the quotation marks, yet sat undecided until some twist of reflection contrasted her hesitancy with her husband's promptness of action. Doctor Provine would not think twice about using a lancet to open an ulcerated wound. Quickly she began her self-set task, covering several pages before her energy abated.

It was not a pleasant story. It told of the reserve and lack of sympathy of a man whose whole aim in life was to succeed in his profession. The wife's joys, amusements, ambitions and plans were thrust aside to suit his convenience. She was of no more importance than the maid who served his meals — per-

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haps not so much. The doctor withheld from his wife all details of his affairs, she often experiencing mortification, thereby, when friends discussed some successful surgical case of which she had not known. In the "study" there was no record of violence such as a man on a lower mental or social plane might exhibit, merely those countless stabs of the feelings of a sensitive, affectionate, proud woman.

When Mrs. Provine read it over, a spot of indignation burned on each cheek. She had borne all this without relief save for an occasional outburst of irritability or a morose silence brought about by her nervous condition, for which the Doctor, with no thought above the physical, had suggested a medicine for the liver. He was all she had said of him, and more; for suddenly Mrs. Provine remembered the immediate cause of her grievance. He, with the large income which must reward his practice, grudged her the pretty clothes she wore, the only consolation of an unloved wife. It was but that morning he had frowned over the bills she had given him to pay, and had asked if she knew that five helpless, crippled babies might be made into healthy, active children with the sum mentioned.

Yes, she had been entirely truthful; had dispassionately stated her deep wrongs which were building a wall between her husband and herself. He was cold, selfish, penurious, neglectful. She would copy what she had written and send it to the newspaper. Perhaps her sorrow would lead some other girl to consider more seriously the character of the man she would wed.

For months Mrs. Provine had not felt so unburdened; and the thought of a companionless position free from those indignities and slights was less unwelcome than it was an hour before.

"I think," she mused, "that I shall delicately broach the subject to-night."

She had taken out a fresh sheet for copying when the Doctor's latch key rattled in the lock. With a guilty consciousness she closed her desk and rose to meet the man who came with a preoccupied air into the back parlor where she was standing. He kissed her in an absent way and with but a brief sentence of

greeting, buried himself in a book which he took from his pocket.

Before Mrs. Provine spoke she looked at him closely. He was goodly to see, with a wholesomeness to his clear skin and eyes and a vigor to his athletic body which vibrated youth and courage; but to the wife who saw with unfriendly eyes, his vigor stood for aggressiveness, his physical perfection, the manifestation of the animal only. To her mind, the lines which formed between his eyes as he bent over his book meant an irritability hidden, however, by his slow speech and constant repression.

Goaded by his silence, she sought relief at the piano, where she began playing softly. Music always soothed her and she felt she would need all possible command of herself for the task she had begun. After a little she decided she might use the present opportunity, a rather uncommon one, to discuss the subject uppermost in her mind. As she half turned to address him, the telephone bell rang and he started up hastily.

She heard his voice, sympathetic and pleasant, making inquiries and replies; and while she wondered why it lacked that sympathy when he addressed her, he continued:

"I cannot call for three or four hours; but I will send a prescription to your nearest druggist, who will prepare and send the medicine to you within thirty minutes."

Hanging up the receiver, he returned to the room and after a vain search of his pockets for his prescription pad or a piece of paper, reached a long arm toward his wife's desk, near which he stood, and raised the lid.

"I will get what you want, Leslie," she cried, running to the desk and whisking her "study" out of sight. "Here is paper." She extended it hurriedly, while her clear creamy skin grew pink under the guilt of her secret.

Doctor Provine looked at her curiously, silently turning to write the prescription which, when despatched by a messenger, left him free to resume his reading. His wife, who was again at the piano, was impelled to glance at him several times and each time she met his eyes meditatively fixed upon her.

"But he isn't thinking of me," she angrily reflected. "No

doubt that look is occasioned by the contemplation of some delicate surgical operation."

Rising from the instrument as dinner was announced, she asked, rather sharply:

"Are you going out this evening?"

"I intended taking you to the Fletcher's musicale, going on to see a patient, and returning as soon as I could."

A smile hovered for an instant at this unusual attention — Doctor Provine detested society affairs — until it came to her mind that the Fletchers were entertaining an eminent pathologist. Coldly she agreed to the arrangement and silently they dined and dressed for the entertainment; but while yet an hour hung heavily before Mrs. Provine, whose courage was insufficient to broach the matter to her so important, the Doctor was called so urgently that he departed at once with the promise to return in time to accompany her.

At once she read over her "study." It was less convincing and appeared even vindictive. By nature just, she easily discerned the injustice of written accusations against her husband when he had no opportunity of replying. Deliberately she tore the sheet across and across, tossing the scraps into the basket; and, inspired by what she complacently conceived to be a most charitable impulse, she began the preparation of a modified "study."

"My husband is cold and unsympathetic," she wrote, but paused as her memory reproduced a scene she once witnessed when a child was injured on the street. Doctor Provine was the first to reach its side and render assistance. The compassion in his face was a contradiction to the written words before her. Her lips tightened, nevertheless, at the remembrance of another, more recent scene when she was ill and longed for his services, his tenderness, his sympathy. Yet he had summoned another physician and installed a trained nurse, paying but short, constrained visits to his wife's bedside. Renewing her ink, she finished the sentence by the addition of the words, "to me," after which she tried to see from his viewpoint. His attitude at that time might have been from his disappointment at the loss of the little one who had not opened its eyes on this world —

he dearly loved children. A wave of tender compassion effaced her judgment as magistrate. She wondered why she had not yielded to her impulse to tell him she was heartbroken over their loss. Perhaps — it was just possible — no, after all, that was but one incident capable of another interpretation. Mrs. Provine allowed her statement to stand.

She carefully considered her other grievances. He was neglectful of her. That was evident to her friends upon whom so often devolved her escort. But then, — sitting judicially she searched for a rebuttal of testimony — might not a man so high and so absorbed in his profession be excusable from social duties? Many times he taxed his magnificent strength. The plaintiff again presented her case: Had a married man a right to allow his ambition to absorb his home and social life?

Not quite so certain as before, with detailed incidents she wrote: "Apparently his love is but for his profession. No doubt such a condition is regarded as worthy and laudable, but it leaves me experiencing the bitter feeling of being of no importance, — a something outlived, unloved."

He was selfish, too. No man could otherwise so exclude his wife from his real life and emotions; but it was due entirely to his wretched profession. There was a time a few years before, in their earlier married life, when he had been different.

And penurious? She suddenly remembered the donation of his services for six months to the Orthopedic Hospital when he would have been regularly employed there. It meant a sacrifice of both time and money. No, he was not really penurious, but he was far from lavish, as she positively stated.

By this time her mind was in such a whirl from playing the parts of plaintiff, defendant and judge all at once, that she was glad to bury her brief under a pile of unanswered letters as she heard her husband enter the hall.

"Ready, dear?"

Mrs. Provine's heart beat a little faster. Was there a shade of tenderness in the brief question, or was it a meaningless repetition, a habit of long standing? For some time she had discontinued the use of endearments which meant nothing — his were but the dried husks of love long ripened and gone. With her

usual calmness she answered. They entered the Doctor's car and the silence was unbroken until they greeted Mrs. Fletcher, their hostess.

They were the first arrivals; and in the short time between the doctor's departure and the coming of other guests, while the men were conversing apart, Mrs. Provine became the confidante of this not particularly desired friend.

"It's all settled, Julia. I told you Mr. Fletcher couldn't continue in his way without my leaving him. I am going day after to-morrow to S. D. We've agreed well enough, as far as that goes, — he really is not a bad sort as to habits and the like, — but I simply won't live with a man who can't support me and who is the perfect embodiment of selfishness."

There was a peevish, discordant note in her complaint which somewhat antagonized Mrs. Provine, who replied in a manner at once noncommittal and free from active sympathy. Mrs. Fletcher reddened a little while grasping the chance to defend herself.

"Oh, I understand your position well enough, although I must say that from your previous sympathy I had expected this confidence would be received in a little different way. A woman like you, with every wish gratified by a husband kind, indulgent and extremely successful, cannot imagine how another woman, not so fortunate, can be miserable when she is misunderstood and denied the things which would make her less wretched. Do you know," — Mrs. Fletcher's voice sank under the weight of her disclosure, — "he actually told me to-day that I was idle and purposeless and so have grown absolutely self-centered. The idea! Well, I will soon be beyond his abuse. We have agreed to avoid publicity and have arranged all the details, even to the alimony."

Mrs. Provine gasped, incredulously.

"Why not?" the other demanded; but by a sudden influx of guests her companion was spared a reply.

By and by Mrs. Provine found herself seated in a quiet corner alone, ineffectually trying to determine if Mr. Fletcher's measure of his wife were in any manner applicable to herself. She felt vaguely wretched, not positively so, as before. Had

she been selfish as well as unjust? Looking up in perplexity she saw advancing a woman whose wide, sorrow-marked eyes told of deep, bitter troubles the world quite well knew, while her sweet, gentle smile and the brave erectness of her fragile figure marked her patience, determination and courage.

Mrs. Provine welcomed her with outstretched hands, moving along to give her a seat.

"This is a pleasant surprise, Mrs. Harwood. It has been a long time since you have attended a social gathering, has it not?"

"A long time, yes." Mrs. Harwood sweetly repeated the phrase with additional emphasis, while the other, aware of the suffering of both pain-racked body and agonized mind during that interval, hastily added:

"It is a deprivation to us all that your delicate health permits us to see you only now and then."

"Thank you. Every one is so kind to me, particularly Doctor Provine. He gives me strength and new courage to battle with this weak body. My dear, he is a man above most men — you see, I may say this to you about my physician notwithstanding that he happens to be your husband."

The listener assented with a polite smile.

"I have wondered," she observed, "if physicians are not more frequently than pastors the father confessors. I do not know from my husband, for he rarely mentions his patients or his occupation."

"He spoke of that once to me. He said he wishes to relieve you of every particle of unnecessary pain or anxiety."

The younger woman could not repress an exclamation.

"He said that?"

"And more, my dear. His love for you is at the root of all his greatness — that and his tenderness for the suffering. Do you know, while on a visit to me during your illness, whenever he spoke of you he could scarcely control his emotion. To me he confided his fear that you might slip away from him; and the thought so unnerved him, when other lives, as well as yours demanded his self-control, that he deemed it wise not to see you often."

"I wish I had known," came unbidden from Mrs. Provine's lips.

After a searching glance at the downcast eyes, the elder woman spoke hurriedly.

"What I say you may never need, but if the occasion should arise, think of it. A woman is no less womanly if she sacrifices herself in any honorable way to bridge a widening gulf between herself and her husband. What is pride when compared with loyalty and forbearance?"

Before Mrs. Provine could answer, the other rose.

"But I must leave you now, for I see Mr. Harwood."

More than one guest watched her move across the room to greet her husband and his companion, a dashing young woman who received Mrs. Harwood's extended hand with more pointed demonstrations than the occasion required.

"And she would do even that," murmured Mrs. Provine under her breath, "while I — " She turned with a start. "Oh! I did not see you approaching, Mr. Fletcher."

"I came from the piazza through the French windows. I saw you sitting here and improved the opportunity to tell you," he went on hastily, "how much I appreciate what you and the Doctor did for me."

Mrs. Provine's eyes widened in surprise.

"Of course it isn't good form for me to mention it since the Doctor wished me not to, but I cannot help saying that I realize so large a sum cannot be raised so quickly without a sacrifice on somebody's part. I feel that it is but right to explain my position, since most of the money was intended for the purchase of your home."

"Mr. Fletcher, I — " began the bewildered Mrs. Provine.

"It was to meet checks my wife had drawn," the man continued doggedly. "To have dishonored them would have hastened a domestic crisis I was endeavoring to avert; to have paid them without the Doctor's aid would have been impossible at the present time. A broker told me yesterday that your husband sacrificed good stock on the day he made the loan to me. I — I — haven't any other good friends like that."

"Not many like him," was all that Mrs. Provine managed

to say before her husband, returning, sat by her side as the first notes of the opening sonata sounded.

Doctor Provine was urgently called again before the evening was half gone and his wife reached home at a late hour to find him still away. Throwing her wraps on a chair, she went straight to her desk and drew out the second "study" which she reread with a frown. Tearing it into bits, without hesitation she grasped a pen and wrote with vigor and determination:

"I am idle and selfish; consequently, I have abundance of time and inclination to misconstrue my husband's acts, or absence of them. The inevitable result is that I am very unhappy and discontented. I imagined him all that he is not; I thought him neglectful when through consideration he spared me details of his professional life; unsympathetic, when he strove to conceal his very tenderness; penurious, when he was the soul of generosity. I was jealous of his profession, even; and now that I have discovered how much I have erred in my judgment and emotions, with my last defense gone, I am miserable because I cannot surrender to the unconscious conqueror. How can I express sorrow for my offense which I firmly believe he does not know existed?"

Pausing for a moment, she stared perplexedly at the words beneath her pen.

"What can I do?" she demanded of herself, "what can I do to avoid a repetition of this?"

Her intuition told her, but dimly, that she had discovered the cause of her discontent, but, as yet, no remedy for it. Indefinite plans occupied her thoughts, plans for large undertakings which should fill her leisurely life and mind until there would be no room for vain imaginings.

"It shall be something to keep me close to my husband's life," she resolved, "for," — her pen took up the expression of her thoughts —

"Absorbed in his own goodly work and secure in his faith in me — yes, I can see it all now — he failed to realize any change in my affection. I cannot, by a gradual resumption of old relations, tear down piece by piece the wall I have builded. I want his assistance to destroy it at once and for all time. I

want to humble myself; but oh! it will be hard to say: I have done you a great injustice, dear — dear! a million times dearer than ever before, — and I ask to be forgiven and taken into your life."

She glanced up suddenly to meet her husband's mildly curious eyes. He hung up his coat and crossed to her side as he inquired:

"Isn't it rather late, Julia?"

Impulsively she rose with arms outstretched, the last "study" in her hand. Reawakened adoration gemmed her eyes and transfigured her face.

"Not too late, my dear, my dear, not too late! Read; and if you can, forgive me."

The Original Ikon.*

BY JOHN W. MITCHELL.

THERE was no particular reason why Mr. James Adams should have been crooked. He just was. He even could have afforded the luxury of honesty, for he had a modest patrimony, yielding not much to be sure, but enough to live on, salted away under his original name and accumulating at compound interest.

Jim's original name was a matter of ancient history, hidden under a cloud of aliases. In the gang of swell mobsmen to which he belonged there were enough aliases in the aggregate to have started a small city directory.

They were well known to the police with whom they usually were on good terms. They were registered in every "front office" from New York to San Francisco, but there were few if any convictions recorded against them. They were of the sort that are rarely convicted.

Just now, however, they had temporarily fallen out with the New York police over a little matter of percentage, and while that difference was unadjusted America was not a safe place for them, so they decided on making the grand tour. Therefore they sailed for Europe, but they took separate steamers, being of that retiring disposition that seeks neither social nor professional notoriety.

The mob numbered six altogether. There was Andreas Wagenkneckt, a graduate of Zurich, whose splendid scientific education enabled him to do wonderful things with paper, ink and chemicals of all sorts. There was Big Halliday, whose clumsy-looking fingers and technical training made him unrivalled in resetting precious stones. There was "Carnegie" White, who looked not unlike the philanthropist and whose mission, like his name

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father's, was to prevent men from dying rich, at which in many instances he almost succeeded. But the other members do not so much matter, as it is principally of Jim's adventure that this chronicle deals.

Jim's speciality was "front." He was big, affable and clever in every way. He had the knack of buying good clothes and wearing them properly, but he had the something behind that, which has been called, for lack of a better name, personal magnetism. So he was a welcome member of the gang which for versatility, ability and completeness was something less than a credit to the land that gave it being.

The gang were models of probity on their way across the Atlantic. They lost money honestly and judiciously in the smoking rooms, drank little and talked less. They took separate but excellent hotels in London, seldom being seen together. In fact they were leading men in their own profession, and they were out to uphold its reputation. As an illustration of their standing in the community, it may be said that once when they wanted some information from Scotland Yard Jim drove over in a cab and got it, freezing the corridor-man dead cold with his aristocratic bearing and his recently acquired monocle.

They did no business in London save to acquire unimpeachable credentials. This in itself was no small accomplishment, for the English are the coldest and most unapproachable people in the world. But the gang worked them for letters that were worth their weight in bank-notes of large denomination.

There was little doing in Paris, for the mob was feeling its way carefully. But the Dutchman had been born in Hamburg, and with his fluency in German to aid them they went through Berlin like a pestilence, as noiseless and mysterious, leaving no trace behind them save bad drafts and raised checks and costly jewels missing between the homes of their owners and the vaults of the safe deposit companies. Germany suffered in its three principal cities, and while it was rubbing its eyes and wondering how it happened, Rome, Naples, and Florence, each with good cause, put up a howl that could be heard from the Adriatic to the English Channel.

It was in Vienna that the gang fell down, and it was all over

a trumpery little piece of pink paper that cost Mr. White $23 at the Nevada National in San Francisco, and which was negotiated for $23,000 in the capital of Austria-Hungary. The check had been carefully punched by the teller in the San Fran bank, but, as has been said, Andreas was more than an artist in paper, and he fixed it just as good as new. He could have fixed it better, but he was too much of an artist to do that.

The trouble occurred when they had to employ some local talent to aid them in negotiating the paper. This untimely help not only cost them a thousand dollars in real money, but made the town too hot to hold them. So the gang melted away to amuse themselves at various health resorts for a few months. It was thus Jim Adams happened to invade St. Petersburg.

When the crash came in Vienna, Jim figured that the line of least resistance for him lay toward the Russian frontier, and he argued that he would as lief take a vacation in Russia as in any other old empire. So from the frontier he drifted on by *troika* and diligence to Moscow, for he had not happened to hit the frontier at a railroad point. In fact he had not sought the convenience of either railway or telegraph in his journey, but, for all that, he entered Russia with as innocent intentions as did ever any other tourist.

He was not out for business, and his passport spoke the truth for once when it said, "Of no occupation." It was only one of several passports he had in his trunk. It is not a matter of common knowledge, but it is worth remembering, that one can acquire a passport and become an American citizen (or several citizens) at any embassy in Europe for two dollars and a little perjury. The embassy clerk gets the two dollars as a fee. Perhaps that is why it is so easy.

Jim soon tired of Moscow, too many cobblestones and too little sanitation for him, so he fared northward to St. Petersburg. where for two months he led a life of perfect virtue at that comfortable, if expensive, hotel where all the porters talk good English, and the head waiter is a mine of information in seven languages.

It was an ideal existence, long, cool rides in the evening on the fussy little passenger launches on the Neva, with the ice only

just out and the wind coming down crisp and cold off Lake Ladoga; cool drives down to the point of Christofsky Island, watching gorgeous sunsets out over the Bay of Finland, and back through the darkening alleys of the island park, with the flutter of Paris gowns and the glitter of military uniforms all around. Then there were the open-air theatres, where the men wore overcoats and the women low-necked dresses, and there were curious solitary excursions through the mysterious maze of shops back of the Sardova, where the tourist seldom penetrates. And there were also the churches. That was where Jim fell from grace.

Now he had not even a dilletante interest in church architecture, and it was almost by accident that he wandered into one. It was a courier at the hotel who told him he ought to see the Napoleon battle flags and French eagles at the Kazin Cathedral. So he went. But it was not the blackened and tattered battle flags that attracted his attention. It was a more sordid and at the same time a much more beautiful sight. It was the *ikons*. He had never heard the word before, nor had many Americans, but the sight thrilled him and aroused him to envy a people who could possess them.

There at the foot of almost every column and supported on gilded pedestals with hundreds of tapers blinking around them, were *ikons* of priceless value. Few were more than one foot by two feet in area, but each frame held a picture, in matchless Russian enamel, of a Virgin, or Christ, or Saint, backed with solid gold and crusted with jewels. A few were intrinsically valueless, mere paintings on wood, very holy and most efficacious in the curing of illness and the answering of prayers. But they were not the ones that held his attention. The ones which appealed to him were inlaid with gems, diamonds, rubies, sapphires and pearls, their golden backgrounds alone representing more coin than a man could carry.

Jim drew a sharp breath at the sight of all this wealth, protected only by flimsy glass and wooden frames. He pondered and retired to think the matter over and gain more knowledge on the subject of *ikons*. The courier at the hotel was communicative, but not enthusiastic.

"Oh yes, there were more or less of them in every Russian church. Some were valuable, very. Perhaps there was $500,000,000 in gold and jewels scattered thus through the churches of the empire. But what did it signify? Women prayed to them and as a last resort they might be converted into cash if the country were at war. But only as a last resort. They were the 'Holy Gold' of the Empire. However, if one were interested in *ikons* and wished to see the real thing, he should visit St. Isaac's Cathedral, opposite the hotel. There rested the marvelous '*Ecce Homo,*' with the great diamond; and the Madonna with the sapphires. They were really worth seeing. But one should choose a bright day for the visit, when the frescoes were also visible."

Jim thought he did not care much about the frescoes, though he did not say so. But he took an early dinner and from his table by the window he watched the people wandering in to the evening service at the great cathedral across the square. He wondered then as he waited for his fish why he had been so neglectful of cathedrals. St. Isaac's, with its bronze sculptures and gigantic monolithic colonnade of pink marble, was certainly an object of legitimate interest on the outside, and doubtless the tourist would be well requited for an inspection within. Anyhow he was going. And so with dinner over, he joined the little stream of worshipers toiling like ants up the great stairway.

Within the massive bronze doors it was already more than half dusk. Far over head the porphyry columns of red, blue and green melted away into shadowy companionship with the great arches that sprung to support the collar of the lantern in the dome. Somewhere far away behind the massive grilled doors of the chancel rose voices of priests, strong and clear, intoning the strange service. Seats there were none, and the few hundred worshipers kneeling on the bare stones of the nave were lost in the distance and immensity of the building. Before the awestruck James rested *ikons* at the foot of almost every pillar. But the problem was to find *the ikon* in the gathering twilight without attracting too much attention.

"Great *ikon,* big diamond, wort' half million!"

It was only the voice of the guide whispering in his ear, but

even the hard trained nerves and muscles of Mr. Adams twitched at this answer to his unspoken question. Yes, there it was right before him, the most costly relic of the whole Empire. Jim passed the guide a ruble, and that functionary, astonished at such munificence, stood a-tremble like a pointer dog, ready to flush a fresh covey of wonders.

Jim gazed long at the *ikon*. But it was a purely professional interest, that entirely overlooked the beauty of the wonderful enamel portrait, scarcely bestowed more than a cursory glance at the big diamond itself, but was most exact in taking in the thickness of the glass over the picture, and the method by which the heavy frame was fastened to the pedestal.

The guide was still at his elbow, anxious to earn the ruble, and urged him on from spot to spot, now pointing out the great malachite columns and dilating on the beauties of the invisible frescoes overhead. Guide-like he was anxious to show off the most costly of the relics and breathed over the various *ikons* in a reverential whisper, "Dis wort' hundred thousand, dis maybe hundred fifty, maybe more."

The Madonna with the sapphire necklace held Jim's attention as had the great diamond. He studied it long and carefully, but from a purely mechanical point of view. Still the guide did not know this and finally dismissed him at the door with a deep bow, feeling the satisfaction of having had an appreciative and generous visitor.

Jim had his problem neatly stated and now the only thing was to solve it. Being of a whole souled, thorough-going nature, he would have liked to loot the cathedral and carry off everything of value inside, including the model of the Holy Sepulchre and the solid gold model of St. Isaac's itself, which was only about ten feet square and weighed not more than a ton. He felt sad at the absence of the other trusty members of the gang with whose aid, physical and immoral, he would have almost felt confident of carrying off St. Isaac's itself. As the case stood, however, he was compelled to play a sole role, but he figured on getting at least the big diamond out of the jurisdiction of the orthodox church.

Jim did not visit St. Isaac's again. He had the lay of the

land and that was enough for the present. Instead he took to motoring, which was no new game to him, and hiring a sixty-horsepower machine by the month, he moved to a boarding house with a big courtyard where the motor could be stabled, and put in the next three weeks personally investigating routes to the frontier. Germany was over 500 miles off, and consequently out of the question. But Finland was only an hour's run to the North, despite the bad roads. To be sure, Finland was nominally a grand duchy of Russia, but a population of upward of a million, almost unanimously "agin" the government was, if anything, better than a hostile border state.

When Jim next visited St. Isaac's he took the precaution of wearing a beard and a dark, inconspicuous tweed suit that would not be familiar to his former friend, the guide. It was not at all the night for dark deeds. It was quite late twilight in that latitude and with the moon at full swinging up over the Neva, it was almost as light as day. The square all round the cathedral was bathed in placid, unreal light, and off in the leafy shadows of the Horse Guards' Boulevard, the couples walked and flirted and the late lingering nursemaid neglected her charge in its perambulator to chat with the *guard-a-voy* as seems to be the habit of nursemaids in all climes and times.

But Jim noted none of these things as he hurried on his way to the church. Inside the huge sculptured portals it was already more than twilight. He entered sedately, made the proper genuflection at the centre of the nave, and skirted the rear of the kneeling crowd of worshipers towards a curtained niche in the far wall, which he knew by prior investigation contained floor mops and buckets. Watching his time, he melted from the deep shadows of the wall to the deeper shadows of the niche. Thereafter there was nothing to do but wait.

The cathedral finally emptied of its worshipers, and the few sightseers soon followed them. Then there was no sound through the thick darkness save the faint, soft pad of the felt booted guards as they went their perfunctory rounds. Toward midnight even this became more infrequent as the watchers of the cathedral settled for longer and longer intervals to lounge and smoke and chat with the *dvorniks* on the stone benches outside

the cathedral door. It was warmer and pleasanter outside the church than in, and the various functionaries drew their long sheepskin overcoats around their felt-booted feet and curled up on the benches to smoke villainous *maghaka* cigarettes and while away the hours till morning.

It was after midnight when Jim ventured from his corner. He did not know how long a time he would have uninterrupted, but set to work at once on the great diamond. He had a short, stout screw-driver, with a cross handle like a corkscrew, that would start almost anything in the screw line. A diamond glass-cutter he carried for emergencies, and his other weapon of the chase was a jointed steel lever with a foot like a tack claw, but professionally known as a "jimmy."

In two minutes Jim decided that *ikons* were the easiest game he ever tackled. One wrench of the jimmy with an overcoat thrown over it to deaden the sound, and the gilt frame was loose from its pedestal. There were but four screws under the frame holding down the priceless gold plate. These came away as though they had been put in only last week. It was a shame — it was so easy, almost like assaulting a cripple.

The Madonna with the sapphires was no harder, and in ten minutes the two gold plates were resting against the foot of one of the columns.

Making a get-away was something more difficult, but Mr. Adams had not been used to crawling into a burrow till he saw an exit on the other side. There was a cellar to the cathedral, for there was a barred window on a level with the ground looking toward the Alexandra Gardens. The entrance to the cellar must be beyond the grilled doors whence Jim had heard the singing, for he had assured himself on his first visit that it was not in the body of the church. Jim had decided to make his hegira through the cellar window, a few iron bars being nothing much in his way, and the window being on the side farthest from where the guards and *dvorniks* congregated.

He was just noiselessly dusting his hands when there was a scarcely audible step in the doorway; the faint shaft of moonlight was blotted out for an instant and the scuff of felt boots and the swish of a voluminous overcoat told of one of the out-

side porters come to make the rounds of the cathedral. A cigarette end glowed in the darkness as he started off to the westward to make the circuit of the church. Jim held his breath till the shadows swallowed up the retreating form even from his dark accustomed eyes. Then with a suppressed chuckle he changed the whole plan of his campaign in an instant, and started on the most exciting man-hunt of his life.

Mr. Adams did not wear felt boots, but he realized the value of rubber heels in his profession so that he glided like a shadow from one great pillar to another toward the north side of the church. Concealment was scarcely necessary, for the church was all but pitch dark. Jim had crossed the church before his quarry had skirted the far end, and he crouched waiting in the shadow of one of the columns, almost fifty yards from the front door and that far from possible interruption.

He heard rather than saw the shadowy form of the porter approach. Almost within arms' reach the *dvornik* stopped to light a fresh cigarette from the stump of his old one. In that moment Jim made his spring. A sinewy right hand closed on the *dvornik's* bearded throat, and a practiced half hook, like the kick of an ostrich, landed on the slumber line of the jaw.

But he never fell. Mr. Adams caught the senseless form in his arms, and deposited it on the floor softly like a bale of blankets. Then he rolled the six feet of unconscious Russian out of his big overcoat as deftly as a nurse in a hospital could have done. Jim wanted that overcoat, also the felt boots and fur cap and the broad chain and metal gorget that hung around his shoulders and down on the breast. Jim appropriated all of these, and with the aid of his false beard made a very fair imitation of the *dvornik.*

Even the *maghaka* cigarette lay on the pavement, smouldering vilely where it had fallen. Appropriating that was a test of nerve and stomach, but realism was everything at the present juncture, so James picked it up and strolled toward the exit, leaving his victim on the floor with a chloroform wad of raw cotton close to his nose. Passing the last pillar he gathered up the two *ikons,* slipped the precious plates under his overcoat, and cinched up his scarf belt to prevent their falling out.

It was like a plunge into cold water to pass the postern in the face of the assembled guards, but trusting to his disguise and especially to the cigarette which now loomed large in their field of vision, Jim took the plunge. It was unexpectedly easy. Four of the watchers were asleep, or smoking and almost dozing on the stone benches. Two were farther off, chatting together on the far side of the portico. The new *dvornik* loafed past them carelessly, still clinging valiantly to his cigarette. Out he went across the portico and down the little side steps out of sight. Once safe from observation he threw the cigarette as far as it would go, and taking a big breath of fresh air to clear his lungs, lighted a Turkish to take the taste out of his mouth.

The remainder of the adventure was scarcely exciting. He passed the *switzar* at the door of his own courtyard without question and it was a matter of no comment that soon after the strange *dvornik* had gone in, Mr. Adams, in his motoring togs came out, strapped a dress suit-case under the front seat and started off for a ride. Even motoring at three A. M. is to be expected from "those mad English." All Englishmen, and that means also all Americans, are mad. The Lord knows that and any *mujik* in Russia will bear witness to the same thing. So the motor puffed off down the English Quay.

There was no incident at the frontier, for there are no customs formalities going into Finland. It was merely two days' hard driving over bad roads to Helsingfors, and thence almost a week by sail and rail before Jim was closeted with Big Halliday in his room at the Kaiserhoff in Berlin, a code telegram having summoned the gem expert to meet him.

When Jim produced the *ikons* and unfolded the history of their taking off, the shrewd eyes of Halliday grew large and his fingers twitched as he produced the tools of his trade from various pockets not located where pockets are in most tailor-made garments.

At the big diamond he gazed in most astonishment, but it was not at the size of the gem. He scratched his massive head and growled, "Looks familiar, looks damned familiar." Then as the sharp-nosed pliers hovered on the edge of the setting, he dropped them and slapped his knee.

"I've got it," he exclaimed in a low tone. "I've got it. It's the original of the model in the Tiffany collection in New York. But then," and he frowned, puzzled, "that was credited to the Nyzim of Hyderbad. He bought it five years back, but, like the most of those Indians, he never would say where he got it or how much he paid for it. But this is the very boulder, all right, all right, came from Brazil and was cut by Lederer in Antwerp. Oh, I know it now like a gambler does an ace. But how the devil did it ever come in a church up in Russia?"

He had set to work again, and the big diamond fell from its bed plate into his broad hand. He held it on edge to the light and grabbed a slender file from the table. One scratch on the edge of the big gem and he turned to Jim, his face a study in emotions. All he could ejaculate was, "Phony, phony by all that's holy. Paste, but the best ever. It fooled me till I got the file on it."

Mr. Adams regarded him calmly. It was a part of his system to win or lose easily. "Guess you'd better try the sapphires," said he, with a gesture that indicated the half million that the diamond ought to have been worth was a mere bagatelle.

They did not even take the sapphires from their setting. One draw of the file across a facet and it melted like wax. The two gentlemen adventurers regarded each other for a space and then Jim said seriously:

"Bill, I'd give the price of a drink to know who got at that *ikon* before I did."

The Encircling Current.*

BY MICHAEL WHITE.

"MR. HOLDEN, let me present you to the Maharaja Badur Singh, and the Pundit (Professor) Sivaji Gokral Sacrata."

The speaker was a strikingly handsome woman, who went through the form of introduction with the easy manner of one long accustomed to the usages of society. The person addressed was a young man possessing that keen alertness of bearing which chiefly marks success in industrial life. Holden had just alighted from an auto under the porte-cochère of a country mansion, and briskly joined a group lounging on a wide shaded porch.

"Having induced the Maharaja to spend a few days with us here," went on Mrs. Colby, the hostess of the mansion, "Mr. Colby thought you might be persuaded to run down from New York and assist us in entertaining him. The Maharaja is visiting the United States to investigate our progress, and we felt sure he would be interested in your electrical work on the Grand Central Railway."

"I shall be happy to give him any information in my power," Holden bowed his desire to please Mrs. Colby.

Then he took another look at the Maharaja. As the first Indian prince Holden had met, the Maharaja Badur Singh was disappointing. Something no doubt was lost to the imagination of Oriental magnificence by his conventional Occidental dress, but his short fat stature and features suggestive of indolence, touched about the lips with sensuality, impressed one as not quite in accord with an earnest desire for progress. Glancing from the Maharaja to his companion, the Pundit Sacrata, Holden was momentarily startled by the striking contrast. The Pundit

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stood a little to the rear of the Maharaja, but rose above the Prince, a tall ascetic figure with turbaned features of chiseled bronze, and sunken eyes that looked at you as if from the depths of his ancient civilization, calmly, remorselessly, and unfathomable. In the clearly masterful face of the Pundit, Holden felt any estimate of him would very likely be wide of the mark.

"Positively you have not even looked in my direction, Mr. Holden," came a note of reproach at his elbow.

He turned quickly to confront a charmingly pretty girl in a dainty summer toilette.

"Why, Miss Colby," he said, taking her hand and holding it for an instant, "the trouble is when I do see you I am blind to everything else. But I am here at your bidding."

"At my bidding?"

"Yes, if I am not mistaken you wrote for Mrs. Colby. Your capital letters are like yourself — imperative. I merely obey."

"Really," she laughed, pleasantly, "you ought to have been an expert in hand writing instead of an electrical engineer."

A middle aged, genial-tempered-looking man, sauntering on to the porch with a cigar between his lips, greeted Holden with the cordiality of a host. As the group separated Colby drew Holden to one side, chatting informally.

"Glad you've joined our party, Holden. How does the new Detroit model run? — An hour and a half from the city. That's good! I see you've been introduced to the Maharaja. Well, we met him in Paris this spring. Found a kind of mutual interest in the fact that the Colby estate was mostly built up in the Boston East India trade years ago. Told the Maharaja he must certainly visit the United States, and here he is. Seems anxious to improve his country, but I must say I can't quite make out his friend, the Pundit."

"Looks like a man of considerable intelligence," remarked Holden.

"Oh, the women think he's a wonder, and apart from a whole lot of philosophical stuff he surprises you occasionally with information right up to date. But as Mrs. Colby has arranged to put him through some sort of test this evening you'll be able to judge for yourself."

The two men then fell into a business discussion which lasted until it was time to dress for dinner.

Later that evening Mrs. Colby's spacious reception room presented an atmosphere of subdued luxury. From clusters of shaded electric lamps the light fell upon the dull gilt of Florentine picture frames, the polished surfaces of buhl and ormolu furniture, and was reflected in the soft rich sheen of silken rugs. Huge vases of cut flowers sent forth a delicate fragrance. Pretty faces, smart frocks, with now and then the flash of jewels completed a certain reposeful charm. Conversation naturally fell into a confidential harmony of accent. The Maharaja was seated, protesting that a precious stone in the lobe of a Hindu lady's nostril was not unbecoming, while as usual the Pundit stood at the Prince's side, motionless like a draped statue. Holden beside Miss Colby on a settee was toying with her fan and venturing admiring glances.

"I believe you are frightened of the Pundit," she said, with a challenging smile from under her lashes. "What would you do if he suddenly transformed you into a — a tiger?"

"Why eat up the Pundit, of course," replied Holden, promptly.

"But seriously?"

"It seems to me it would be extremely serious considering his — well — sparcity of tissue."

"No, but if he were to do something really occult — mysterious — inexplicable. You know he believes in being able to render himself invisible and pass through matter at will."

Holden smiled, incredulously.

"Not in the United States I think. But I understand he is going to put us or himself to a test this evening. Then I will be able to answer your question. There is your butler placing a table in the centre of the room, and Mrs. Colby has risen. I guess it's up to the Pundit."

"And now," said Mrs. Colby, halting the general conversation, "I will ask the Pundit Sacrata to — to give us the sèance he kindly promised. I am sure we shall all be most interested."

Sacrata looked up slowly and bowed, raising his open hands and touching his forehead with the tips of his fingers after the Hindu fashion.

Mrs. Colby gathered her guests around the small table on which the butler had set a cut glass bowl three parts filled with water. The Pundit took a position slightly bending over the table.

"Would — would you like the room darkened?" she asked, glancing toward the Pundit.

Merely the trace of a smile touched Sacrata's thin lips, but it conveyed nothing of Occidental significance.

"Only silence," he responded. "Is it not out of silence all things come to us — we who appear and disappear in silence. In the light of the mind there is no other light, not even that of the Sun, for the light of the mind alone is infinite."

The words fell clear and resonant, but with a modulation of sound suggestive of distance. Sacrata turned his eyes interrogatively upon Miss Colby.

"Do you wish me to do something — assist you?" she asked, moving a pace forward to the inner rim of the circle.

"If you will look into the water and say what you see there," he requested.

Miss Colby stood opposite Sacrata while Holden edged to a place at her side. As the silence which Sacrata requested ensued, varying degrees of curiosity became marked on the guests' faces. Sacrata closed his eyes and for some moments moved his lips without verbal sound. Then he passed his hand over the water. The water shivered — Holden noticed it distinctly. Sacrata directed a questioning look upon Miss Colby.

"The water seems clouded — opalescent," she remarked.

To Holden it appeared clear as crystal, but he noticed Miss Colby had paled slightly.

"Look once more," Sacrata enjoined.

He bent down and breathed upon the water. "*Ram — Ram — Sita — Ram,*" he murmured. Then he swept his hand quickly over the water. A violent agitation succeeded in which some of the water splashed over the edge of the bowl. In a moment it had subsided into a placid surface. "*Ram — Ram — Sita — Ram,*" seemed to come like an echo out of space. Sacrata waited with eyes fixed on Miss Colby.

"Why," she cried. "Why — I see what seems to be a

picture of my uncle, Peter Colby, rescuing a woman from a crowd of wild white-robed figures. My uncle drags the woman away and — and — Why, there is the ruby he left me at the bottom of the water."

Sacrata touched the water lightly with his fingers.

"Oh, now it is all gone," exclaimed Miss Colby, lifting her head.

Holden gazing into the bowl had failed to observe a trace of the scene described by Miss Colby, but at its conclusion he caught a flashing glance pass from Sacrata to the Maharaja.

A short pause was broken by Mr. Colby's voice.

"That is certainly curious. It is just about the way the Colby ruby came into our possession. Peter Colby was the head of our firm out in India. Lived there thirty years I guess. It seems his bungalow was on a road which led to some temple, and religious processions were often passing. But there was one kind of procession that went by occasionally which maddened him right to the core. That was when they were taking out some woman to burn on her husband's funeral pyre. At last, when he saw a young girl being led to the sacrifice, he couldn't stand it any longer. He dashed out, hurled the Brahmins aside, and dragged the girl into his bungalow. He tried to persuade her to remain under his roof for safety, but she was all worked up with bhang into a religious frenzy. In struggling to detain her something dropped from her hand. Then she fled. What became of the girl he never knew, but the thing she left behind turned out to be a large ruby. When Peter Colby came to investigate he found that the ruby was the eye of a god dedicated to widow burning, and that it was part of the ceremony for the poor women to carry the god's eye on their way to the funeral pyre. Without the god's eye ruby there could be no widow burning. That decided Peter Colby to stop widow burning in his district by shipping the ruby to the United States out of harm's way. But pretty soon after that, as things began to happen like finding a cobra in his bathtub or a queer taste in his tea, he thought it best to follow the ruby home to Boston. There people used to call him the Nabob on account of his Oriental ways. When he died he left the ruby to my daughter, Thalia,

for a wedding present or when she came of age. It's hardly suitable to wear in its present shape," added Colby, "because apart from its crude cutting there is a character or text engraved on one of the facets. Tiffany says that spoils its unmatched beauty. So as my daughter's twenty-first birthday comes in a few months, we decided to have the stone recut and polished for her to wear as a pendant."

While notes of interest fell from the lips of the guests, Holden observed a look break upon Sacrata's face as if smitten with a horrible sacrilege. It was only momentary and the Pundit quickly recovered his outward calm.

"If you'd care to see the ruby," suggested Colby, "I will show it to you."

Eager expressions of desire followed Colby's retreat from the room. Presently he returned holding the sacred gem in the outstretched palm of his hand. It was as large as a walnut and gleamed with that blood-red fire which distinguishes a ruby of the finest quality. The Maharaja bestowed upon it a casual glance, but the Pundit Sacrata bent over it reverentially.

"I guess you, gentlemen," Colby addressed his Oriental guests, "have become too enlightened to blame Peter Colby for stopping that widow burning, or to hold a superstitious connection between it and a ruby, or any stone."

The Maharaja made a gesture as if coinciding with Colby's sentiment, but the Pundit Sacrata gave no sign of his opinion. In Holden's mind ran the strange Hindu devotee's petition, "*Ram — Ram — Sita — Ram.*"

"Say, Colby," lightly broke in one of the guests. "If you will tell me just where you keep that ruby, why, you may find it gone some morning."

Sacrata appeared to be lost in mental abstraction.

"Certainly," replied Colby, obligingly. "I make no secret about that. The ruby is kept in a specially constructed safe in the library. But," he added, with the smile of a man who prided himself on some special achievement, "I wouldn't advise you to try and open it. The chances are you would not have time to be surprised at what happened."

Shortly after this the Maharaja and the Pundit begged per-

mission to retire to their apartment, and in the breaking up of the company Holden and Miss Colby found themselves alone together on a piazza. Across a wide sweep of lawn the moon was reflected in a silver streak of water, with a dark background of wooded hills beyond. A light breeze played upon their faces with a balmy touch.

"Well," she remarked, resting her hands on the balustrade. "Of course the Pundit's bringing out the story of my ruby was curious, but it was hardly wonderful or mysterious."

"No, perhaps not," replied Holden, staring out into the moonlight with a thoughtful face, "but — "

"But what?"

"Well, it seemed to be with a purpose."

"What kind of purpose?"

"Ah! That remains in the brain of the Pundit. I may have an idea, though I would not care to express it on the chance of doing an injustice to the Pundit. But I have two suggestions to make."

"Which are?"

"First that it might be a good plan to take special care of the ruby when you wear it."

"And the second?"

"That some one ought to take special care of you whether you are wearing the ruby or not."

"Oh! May I ask if you can recommend a suitable person for that troublesome office?"

"Certainly," he replied, turning upon her eagerly, "I — "

"No," she interposed with a defiant upward tilt of the head, vexed at being led into a conversational trap. "No ; I know whom you would recommend. But first of all I shall have to consider you as a reference. Until that is decided we had better put off discussing the principal. Besides I hear Papa calling for you to smoke with him in the library."

Holden sank into a chair in the library, accepted one of Colby's cigars, and for a space smoked in silence.

"Thinking about the sèance?" at last queried Colby.

"Not exactly," replied Holden, flicking the ash off the end of his cigar as if withdrawing his mind from concentration. "By

the way, though, how long do your Oriental guests intend to stay?"

"They came yesterday and return to New York to-morrow."

Holden nodded.

"I was thinking," he went on, "just how a burglar could get into that electrically protected safe of yours."

Colby chuckled with a note of personal satisfaction.

"That electrical attachment was practically my invention — fifteen hundred volts shot into you the moment you attempt to open the door. So the amateur is one too much for the professional, aye, Holden?" he taunted good-naturedly. "Well, why not clip the wires, since even you don't know the location of the switches."

"Oh, I know you've fixed that all right by running the wires through solid concrete. But what is to prevent a burglar using rubber gloves?"

"Nothing, except that a possible burglar is not likely to know of the electrical attachment. And mind you the inner casket is further protected by a separate circuit. So the chances are about ninety-nine to one that when the burglar discovered it, he would be no longer a burglar."

"Well," said Holden, "I haven't any rubber gloves with me, but for all that I believe I could beat your electrical attachment."

"Try it," challenged Colby. "I'll give you the combination. It's my daughter's name."

Holden glanced at the small safe sunk deep in the wall and shook his head.

"No, I haven't a definite idea at present, but I may surprise you by handing you the ruby at breakfast."

"All right," laughed Colby, "but with deference to your professional skill, I guess not. Anyway you understand the danger."

When the two separated Holden went to his room and slipped a pistol in his pocket. Then he returned to the library and set the dial of the safe to the word combination — Thalia. But after satisfying himself that the current was turned on he did not make any attempt to open the safe. Instead he switched off the lights in the library, and went out of the house by a side door. Strolling round to a point of observation he glanced up at a window. The silhouette of a turbaned head appeared upon the shade.

"I'll bet those fellows knew that ruby was here," muttered Holden, pensively, "and proved it by hypnotic suggestion. What's more, they'll probably make a try for it to-night since they conclude their visit to-morrow. It will be interesting to see how Colby's electrical protective attachment works. No use letting them injure the safe when the attachment ought to get them anyway."

After watching the window for perhaps half an hour the light suddenly went out, and Holden stole back into the house. Gaining the reception room he stationed himself in the deep shadow of an angle, from whence he could see into the library partly illuminated by the slanting rays of the moon. It proved to be a long wait for Holden, with a silence broken only by the measured ticking of the great hall clock. Chimes solemnly proclaimed the quarter, half, and full hours. At last Holden's strained ears caught the sound of hushed footfalls. Presently two figures moved cautiously into the library. They were easily distinguishable as the Pundit and the Maharaja. For some moments they conversed in an undertone. Then the Pundit produced a small lamp and approached the safe.

"Now," thought Holden, "for the fifteen hundred volts. If he gets one-half the charge it ought to knock him clear across the room."

From his place of concealment, Holden tensely watched the Pundit try the handle and swing the door open. A few blue sparks was the sole demonstration. The Pundit appeared to be surprised to find the safe unlocked, and so was Holden, for it was evident not a volt had gripped the Pundit's muscles. Yet Holden knew the attachment was mechanically perfect. It was the same with the circuit of the inner casket. Presently the Pundit drew forth the sacred stone and held it up before the Maharaja. Its sparks of blood-red fire matched the fanatical light in the Pundit's eyes.

"By the will of the gods," spoke the Pundit, "Behold at last the holy stone of *Sati* (Widow burning). Behold the sacred sign of the Brahmins. Now will your Highness be able to reestablish the ancient rite, and the imprint of the hands of devotees again mark your palace gate."

At that point Holden had grasped his pistol to interpose forcibly

in the pious intention, but he was stayed by another footstep descending the stairs. What could that mean? In a moment the lights in the library were switched full on, and Miss Colby entered arrayed in a filmy dressing robe. She passed in with a quick step, but stopped abruptly when her eyes fell upon the two men regarding her with startled sinister expressions.

"I — I came down for a book," she seemed to find it necessary to explain her presence. Then as she noticed the open safe — "Why — What — I — I don't understand."

The Pundit was turned away from Holden, and that proved an advantage. Holden saw the Pundit's hand slip beneath his long robe, and then caught the glint of steel. The Pundit took a step toward Miss Colby. But he had barely completed it before Holden had sprung upon him. With his pistol at the Pundit's temple, Holden seized the wrist of the knife hand in a vise-like grip. As the Pundit swung around, his revengeful face almost touched Holden's cheek.

"One word — one movement," said Holden, without relaxing a muscle, "and you'll be a dead Pundit. Maharaja, if you move or utter a sound I'll shoot the Pundit first and you after. Now, Pundit, drop that knife."

The Pundit held fast to the villainous curved blade and glared fiercely.

"Drop it," ordered Holden, between his set teeth, "or by all your infernal gods I'll shoot."

The Pundit reluctantly obeyed.

"Miss Colby," requested Holden, "will you kindly take charge of that carving knife?"

Miss Colby responded with admirable self-possession.

"Thank you. Now you will find your ruby in this gentleman's other hand. You may as well relieve him of it. Come, Pundit," he added, as Sacrata evinced still less desire to part with the gem. "You know the alternative."

The Pundit relinquished the gem sullenly.

"Now, Miss Colby," said Holden, backing away and covering both men with his pistol, "if you will go and call your father, I think this matter can be settled without alarming any one or undesirable publicity."

Miss Colby seemed disinclined to leave him, but on a reiteration of his request she departed. Presently Mr. Colby appeared, with astonishment on his face.

"Good Heavens! Why — What does this mean? The Maharaja and — "

Holden briefly explained the situation. For reasons that he could not define he had suspected the Orientals of a design to secure the sacred ruby. But without an atom of proof to back up his suspicion, he felt the impossibility of even hinting the charge, considering the persons involved were Mr. Colby's guests. Therefore he decided to take the matter in hand on his own responsibility, trusting to catch the thieves in the act, and incidentally give the Pundit the benefit of Mr. Colby's electrical protective attachment. In the latter Holden confessed his surprise and disappointment.

"Yes — Yes!" exclaimed Colby. "I don't understand how it failed to work. The current is full on — fifteen hundred volts."

"Neither do I," agreed Holden, "unless the Pundit controls some occult force more powerful than electricity."

He strode over to the safe; examined it, and seemed satisfied. Then he looked over the Pundit. Presently his eyes brightened. He ordered the Pundit to lift the hem of one of his pants. When the Pundit complied, Holden smiled.

"Jove!" he exclaimed. "So that's it. To think that silk socks didn't occur to me before!"

"Silk socks?" questioned Colby, with astonishment.

Holden bent down cautiously and took the edge of one of the Pundit's socks between his thumb and forefinger. When he straightened himself he nodded.

"Yes, silk is a non-conductor of electricity. With silk socks of that quality the Pundit could dance all over a third rail. Pundit," he added, addressing Sacrata, "you are a darned side luckier than you deserve, as I guess you knew nothing about the electrical protective attachment." *

"Well, gentlemen," said Colby, "as there is nothing you can

* *Author's Note.* — Not long since an Assistant Electrical Superintendent of a leading railway was put to a similar "silk sock" problem in New York. The mystery was not cleared up until it was found an electric trap of high power was defied by the wearing of silk socks. I am indebted to the Superintendent for the electrical facts. M. W.